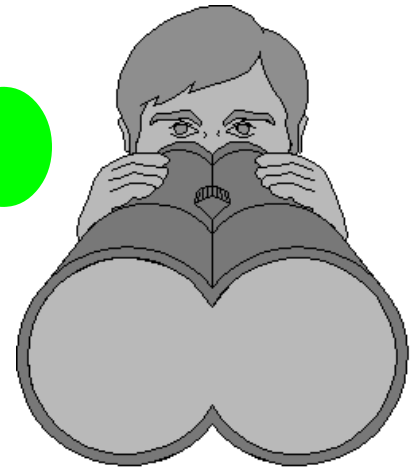


AN OVERVIEW OF THE COMMISSIONERS' ROLES



PROGRAMS

Commissioners must identify local conservation needs, set goals, and develop plans to achieve those goals, and ensure implementation of the plan in order to maintain effective programs.

PLANNING

Planning is the basic tool for developing conservation district programs.

A **Long-Range Plan** is developed by the district and updated as needed. A major revision is completed every five years. This plan serves as a broad outline of your district's response to long term shifts in land use, population patterns and improvements in technology. It includes goals for all Partners: NRCS, SCDNR, District Employees and the Board of Commissioners.

An **Annual Work Plan** outlines specific objectives and activities to achieve long-range plans. The following are **guidelines** for all plans:

- The district, with its partners, must assess and define the conservation problems and needs of the district.
- All commissioners, associate commissioners, cooperating agency representatives and interested citizens should be involved.
- Commissioners should do the planning, not the paid staff. They provide you with basic information and advice.
- Keep the plan simple.
- Evaluate your success after the plan is implemented.

Information and Education

Conservation districts encourage volunteer cooperation of land users and the general public through information and education programs. Landowners and operators must be educated so they will understand and adopt conservation values and practices. The general public must be reached so they will understand their stake in conservation and contribute their financial, political, and volunteer support to district programs. You must also inform local, state, and federal legislators on conservation issues. Commissioners should be aware of the many ways available to communicate their message. A few examples are as follows:

- personal contact
- inviting persons to district board meetings
- newsletters
- field tours
- demonstrations
- workshops
- awards programs
- newsletters

LEGISLATORS

Legislators are an important audience. Local, state, and federal laws affect district programs. Make personal contacts with all of your legislators by letter or phone calls and inform them of your conservation accomplishments and of your conservation needs. Bring your statewide and national legislative concerns to The South Carolina State Association of Conservation Districts (SCACD) and the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD).

YOUTH EDUCATION

A major aim of conservation education is to enrich the conservation values of people. Youth education offers one of the most fertile avenues for this enrichment. Conservation districts should develop a wide variety of methods to reach youth. Some are as follows:

- sponsoring conservation workshops
- training teachers in conservation
- providing educational materials
- involving youth leaders in board meetings
- organizing a “youth board”
- developing programs and projects that involve youth
- locating conservation projects that are meaningful to youth
- assisting in developing outdoor classrooms
- planning demonstrations and tours

PUBLIC RELATIONS

Your conservation district's public image affects every aspect of your work. Public relations is a continuing program to help people understand what your conservation district is, what you are doing and why it is important. Good public relations can:

- inform the public of what the conservation district is and does
- promote favorable recognition of the district
- ensure that all the people in your district are aware of the availability of district assistance
- build rapport with other groups
- increase the amount of funds that your district receives
- increase the quality and amount of assistance the district obtains from cooperating agencies
- improve the quality of people who serve as conservation district commissioners or on conservation committees

The district should set goals for the basic understanding you would like the public to have about your district. In developing and maintaining your district's public relations program, make sure all information is consistent.

- Board members and associate commissioners should represent the board in person. Do not rely on paid staff.
- Pay attention to public relations details throughout your district program; treat people warmly over the phone and in correspondence. Follow through on commitments, pay attention to cultural differences, and give adequate recognition to agencies, associations and other groups with whom you work.
- The board should determine who speaks on its behalf.

WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

Whether you are engaging in information, education, public relations, or all three, you will use a whole range of media from personal contacts to mass media. Establish friendly, mutually helpful relationships with the media representatives. If you convince them of the importance of your program, they will convince the public. In order that your district may have effective media relations you must decide:

- why you want media coverage
- who your audiences are
- which media would be most effective in reaching different audiences



COMMITTEES

Conservation districts may accomplish their work through committees. Committees study district business in specific areas, such as finance or tree programs, and sift out important matters for the board to consider. Committees also implement and monitor decisions made by the board and gather support from organizations and agencies represented on the committee.

There are many different types of committees. A “standing committee” is a permanent committee charged with working on a basic aspect of district work. Conservation districts typically have standing committees for planning, district operations, education, finance, research, land-use planning, water quality, recreation, water resources, and soil stewardship.

Other functions of your district may require short term or “ad hoc” committees for a specific task or time period. Examples may include watershed, nominating, annual meeting, or grant committees.

The chair and board members appoint themselves, associate commissioners, district advisors, representatives of cooperating agencies and associations, or interested citizens as committee members. Look to people with an active or personal or professional interest in the committee’s purpose. Committees also serve as an entry point and training ground for people who may eventually become a district commissioner.

Committees have no legal or official authority and cannot vote on the district board’s business or obligate district funds. However, encourage their participation. Be sure to include opportunities at board meetings for recognition of committee progress. Regardless of whether a committee is “ad hoc” or “standing”, each should have a specific mission similar to a job description for an individual.